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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Iraq

Key stories in the media:

The major media bannered the killing of four Israelis in a suicide bombing last night in the West Bank. A Palestinian who was apparently disguised as an ultra-Orthodox Jew hitchhiked a ride with an Israeli car and blew himself up at the entrance to the settlement of Kedumim. Israel Radio reported that Fatah's Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for the bombing. A Brigades operative speaking to Maariv's online service, NRG, identified the bomber as Hebron-born Ahmed Masharka, and threatened many more suicide bombers. Leading media reported that the IDF responded with air, land, and sea assaults against targets in the areas from which Qassam rockets were launched on Thursday. Yediot reported that on Thursday, Mofaz instructed the IDF to boost targeted assassinations. This morning, Israel Radio reported on an assassination attempt in Gaza against Abu Yusuf Guga, a senior leader of the Popular Resistance Committees. It was unclear who stood behind the operation.

Major media reported that Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice hinted during her visit to Berlin Thursday that the US would consider Israel's plans for additional territorial withdrawals. Ha'aretz quoted Secretary Rice as saying: "I wouldn't on the face of it

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just say absolutely we don't think there's any value in what the Israelis are talking about." Ha'aretz quoted Israeli and American officials as saying Thursday that Rice's statements seemed prepared in advance and crafted to avoid committing the U.S. to supporting unilateral Israeli measures, but also to put pressure on Hamas and the new Palestinian government.

The media reported that Acting PM Ehud Olmert met Thursday with Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch and Deputy US National Security Advisor Elliott Abrams, who invited him to Washington in May. Ha'aretz, which said that most of the talks focused on the Israeli elections results, reported that Olmert told the American officials: "Some [government] coalitions are more comfortable from a foreign-affairs perspective, while others are more comfortable in the area of economics." Ha'aretz wrote that Welch and Abrams agreed during their talks in Jerusalem that there would be no contact with Hamas members in the PA. They announced that the U.S. would not transfer money to the Hamas government or other Hamas agents, reiterating the government's commitment to the three conditions for Washington's recognition of the new Palestinian government: the renunciation of violence, the recognition of Israel and the commitment

to previous agreements signed between Israel and the PA. Ha'aretz reported that the American emissaries emphasized the importance to Washington of preventing a humanitarian crisis in the PA, hinting that pressure on Israel would intensify if conditions in the territories worsened. Israel Radio quoted FM Tzipi Livni as saying on Thursday during a meeting with Welch and Abrams that the day the Hamas government was sworn in, Israel cut all ties with the PA, except humanitarian aid. Leading media quoted FM Livni and Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz as saying during meetings with the senior US officials that Israel views the PA as responsible for acts of terror, and it is clear that the Hamas government is not prepared to fight terrorism. Mofaz and Livni were also quoted as saying that Israel intends to leave the passages with the Gaza Strip open. Israel Radio quoted Mofaz as saying that this would not happen at the price of the lives of Israelis. Hatzofe reported that information has reached Jerusalem that the US will soon "resume" humanitarian aid to the Palestinians through USAID and the UN Development Program. Hatzofe cited the concern of Israeli officials that the funds would reach the Hamas government.

All media reported that on Thursday, the Central Elections Committee (CEC) published the results of the elections, after the special votes (from soldiers, diplomats, and others) were counted -- in brackets, number of seats as made public on the day after the election:

Kadima: 29 (28); Labor: 20; Shas: 12 (13); Likud: 12 (11); Yisrael Beiteinu: 11 (12); National Union-National Religious Party 9; Pensioners' Party: 7; United Torah Judaism: 6; Meretz: 5 (4); Arab parties: 9 (10) (Balad -- National Democratic Assembly: 3; Hadash: 3; and United Arab List: 3 (4)). The CEC will release its official announcement on April 5th. Yediot quoted Olmert associates as saying that the two seats that Kadima and Meretz gained "increase the chance of withdrawals in the West Bank." Hatzofe reported that the 17th Knesset will be sworn in on April 17, during Passover week. Ha'aretz quoted Olmert as saying behind closed doors that he is leaning toward bringing Avigdor Lieberman's Yisrael Beiteinu into the coalition instead of Shas. Ha'aretz noted that Olmert can form a 61-MK majority coalition without Shas that would support his convergence plan: Kadima-Labor-Pensioners' Party-Meretz.

Ha'aretz reported that former Mossad chief Ephraim Halevy reveals, in a soon to be published book, "Man in the Shadows," that a few days before the failed assassination attempt on Hamas leader Khaled Mashal in Jordan in 1997, the late King Hussein conveyed an offer from the Hamas leadership to reach an understanding on a cease-fire for 30 years. Halevy claims that the offer, intended for then-PM Binyamin Netanyahu and conveyed by a Mossad representative, reached Netanyahu only after the botched hit.

Yediot and The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday, PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas called Olmert from South Africa and congratulated him on winning the elections. The newspapers quoted Abbas as saying he hoped that Olmert would succeed in forming a coalition as soon as possible. Both newspapers wrote that the call was not followed by an announcement of any plans for a meeting. Israel Radio reported that Palestinian PM Ismail Haniyeh wrote in the British daily The Guardian that Olmert's unilateralism is a recipe for conflict.

Ha'aretz reported that Kadima Knesset Member-designate and former Shin Bet head Avi Dichter wrote in an analysis paper released in Washington and co-authored with American researcher Daniel Byman under the auspices of the Saban Center for Middle East policy-Brookings Institution, that in its fight against Palestinian terrorism, Israeli intelligence is especially interested in couriers -- the envoys who convey messages between underground cells. The Jerusalem Post quoted Israeli archaeologists as saying that the main road that ran from Jerusalem's City of David to the Temple Mount during the time of the Second Temple has been uncovered.

Yediot reported that PM Sharon is expected to be transferred in two weeks from Hadassah University Hospital, Ein Karem, in Jerusalem, to the rehabilitation hospital in the Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer, in the Tel Aviv area.

Ha'aretz (English Ed.) reported that results from the mock Israeli elections that took place among 8,500 students on campuses across the US last week gave the Likud Party control of the government with 44 Knesset

seats -- about four times what the Israeli electorate gave that party. The newspaper wrote that with an estimated 400,000 Jewish college students in the US, the number of online voters reflects only a very small percentage of the student body.

I. Mideast:

Summary:

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "However regrettable it may be, the Americans have no answers that extend beyond the range of immediate events."

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "The US opposes unilateral moves and supports the bilateral approach based on the Roadmap. But this should be seen, at most, as an opening position."

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz: "[Olmert's] national leadership skills will be tested by how well he keeps his promises to end the occupation."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea and diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "The Labor Party is [Ehud Olmert's] preferred partner. From this standpoint, at least, he is following in Sharon's footsteps."

Editorial Page Editor Saul Singer wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "If there is sadness to this election, it is because of the sense of impotence that Israel's news strategy brings when stripped of its global context."

Columnist Khaled Abu Toameh wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "Olmert, like the rest of the world, will have to decide which authority he must deal with -- the 'irrelevant' one led by Abbas or the 'video-conference' Hamas government."

Block Quotes:

I. "March Madness"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 31): "The question now on the agenda is how to deal with Hamas.... However regrettable it may be, the Americans have no answers that extend beyond the range of immediate events. During Ehud Olmert's visit to the United States -- he has already been invited by the President, but probably no date will be set before some progress is made in forming the new coalition -- the sides will discuss seriously, and in fact for the first time, the long-term options that are available. The talks will go beyond trying to resolve current problems and extinguishing the small fires that distract the leaders' attention from the greater vision."

II. "Keep Steady Now"

Washington correspondent Nathan Guttman wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 31): "The US opposes unilateral moves and supports the bilateral approach based on the Roadmap. But this should be seen, at most, as an opening position.... Only after a mechanism of assisting the Palestinians is put in place and the PA's economy is stabilized will the US begin to deal with the greater question of whether there is any way to revive the Roadmap and push for bilateral negotiations, or whether that phase is gone forever and it is time to examine Olmert's unilateral ideas."

III. "Go Olmert Go -- Part II"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in Ha'aretz (March 31): "Kadima didn't get what it wanted, but it is still Israel's No. 1 party.... Olmert has a majority for putting together a peace government and continuing Sharon's legacy. I see all these gloomy faces around me, and I don't understand why. Kadima is a party that came out of nowhere.... But this party has made history.... As someone who has never been in a front-line leadership position at any stage in his political career, now is the time for Olmert to show what he's made of.... Olmert is a smart, intelligent guy, and an experienced Knesset member, minister,

mayor, and political activist. As the stand-in for a comatose prime minister, he played it low-key and cautious. From now on, things will not be easy. His national leadership skills will be tested by how well he keeps his promises to end the occupation. I said it last week, and there's not much more I can do but say it again: Go, Olmert, go."

IV. "The First Olmert Government"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea and diplomatic correspondent Shimon Shiffer wrote in mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (March 31): "The Labor Party is [Ehud Olmert's] preferred partner. From this standpoint, at least, he is following in Sharon's footsteps. He is convinced that the Labor Party is closest to his foreign policy plan (Peretz agrees with him on this point), and he believes that its senior members are also close to him in their economic and social views.... [Foreign Minister Tzipi] Livni truly believes in disengagement.... Israel's governmental culture is based on rivalry: Everyone barricades himself in his own territory. This is particularly prominent in the relations with the US: The Prime Minister on his own, the Foreign Ministry on its own, the Defense Ministry and the army on their own. Livni hopes to break this circle of folly."

IV. "Converging on Containment"

Editorial Page Editor Saul Singer wrote in The Jerusalem Post (March 31): "Neither a containment strategy nor a more realistic victory strategy makes sense outside the context of the West's global war to defeat the Islamist Jihad. If America is losing its war, our containment won't work; if America is winning, containment is not ambitious enough. If there is sadness to this election, it is because of the sense of impotence that Israel's news strategy brings when stripped of its global context.... Our challenge now is to work to integrate our private containment approach with a global victory strategy that provides a realistic basis for hope and peace."

IV. "Burning Issues"

Columnist Khaled Abu Toameh wrote in The Jerusalem Post (March 31): "Abbas and some Fatah officials may be sincere about their desire to return to the negotiating table, but the sounds emerging from the parliament chamber on Tuesday, during the vote of confidence, do not seem to offer any hope, at least not in the foreseeable future. 'Jihad is our path and the Koran is our constitution, Allah akbar!' was only one of the battle cries sounded by dozens of defiant Hamas legislators and ministers. Abbas did appear, earlier in the week, to stand firm against the new Hamas cabinet's political program.... Olmert, like the rest of the world, will have to decide which authority he must deal with -- the 'irrelevant' one led by Abbas or the 'video-conference' Hamas government, whose West Bank ministers and leaders are, for the time being, using public transportation to commute between cities and villages."

12. Iraq:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The strategic problem turns into the question of the cheapest way to withdraw."

Block Quotes:

"The Wrong War"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 31): "Are the Americans winning the war in Iraq, or losing? From the Six-Day War we learned that even a sweeping military victory does not always end the military confrontation, when the victorious forces remain as occupation forces. From the Lebanon War we learned that a prolonged stay in the field turns yesterday's supporters into enemies, and the strategic problem turns into the question of the cheapest way to withdraw.... An important test will be whether the disintegration of Iraq into three entities, and an ensuing civil war, will be prevented.... [However,] the Iraqi government is on a democratic path. Saddam Hussein has been overthrown, and weapons of mass destruction were eliminated even before the war. One

of these days, Iraq will once again be a regional power
-- on condition that it does not fall under the
influence of Shi'ite Iran."

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